

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

May 12, 2010

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Lisa Jackson
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Lubchenco and Administrator Jackson,

Thank you for your committed response to the disastrous Deepwater Horizon spill. As you know, the potential impacts in both the near- and long-term are a major concern to the people of Florida.

I write today because I am concerned about the use of large quantities of dispersants during operations to contain the spill. Recent media reports have indicated that some of our nation's best and brightest scientists have concerns about the unintended consequences of dispersant use of this magnitude. We must be sure that the cure is not worse than the ailment.

According to a 2005 National Academy of Sciences report, dispersants "do not actually reduce the total amount of oil entering the environment." By breaking up the oil to prevent a large surface slick, dispersants instead keep the oil in the water column, where it may do as much--if not more--harm. Further, as I understand it, subsea application of dispersants is a relatively novel concept, and we are learning as we go.

I hope you can apprise me of what studies or analyses have been done to ascertain whether oil within the water column is damaging to marine resources like reef fish or coral. Similarly, what evidence is there that these dispersant chemicals are safe? Do they bioaccumulate and thus pose a risk to the food chain? What sort of long-term monitoring do your agencies intend to ensure that our seafood is free of dispersants? Finally, at what point would there be a determination that more dispersant application should stop?

I recognize that sometimes a necessary cure can have negative side-effects; I just want to ensure that we know what those side-effects are. I look forward to your response and thank you again for your efforts in mitigating the effects of this spill.

Sincerely,

